

would be found if currently inaccessible areas become available for biological surveys.

This inventory drew upon data maintained by the NCNHP from previous inventory work, including rare species records and previous reports on natural areas. In addition to this, topographic maps, geologic maps, and aerial photographs were used to help target potential areas of interest. For sites that merited recognition as SNHAs, natural communities and rare species are described using standard report formats developed by the NCNHP. Updated SNHA boundaries and rare species occurrences are maintained at the NCNHP headquarters in Raleigh, in a Geographic Information System (GIS) database. The information is available from NCNHP, the Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (CGIA) in Raleigh, and the western regional office of CGIA in Asheville.

SNHAs are ranked as National, State, Regional, or County Significant based on criteria used by the NCNHP. The criteria used for site significance are:

National Significance: These sites are considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality occurrences of their type in the nation. Comparable (or more significant) sites may occur elsewhere in the nation.

State Significance: These sites are considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality occurrences in North Carolina after any Nationally Significant examples. There may be comparable (or more significant) sites elsewhere in the nation or the state.

Regional Significance: These sites contain communities or species that are represented elsewhere in the state by better quality examples, but which are among the highest quality or best examples in their geographic region of the state. The geographic region within which they are considered is based on location and geologic and/or geomorphic similarity and is defined by NCNHP.

County Significance: These sites are considered to contain significant biological resources at the county level, but which do not rank at the regional (or higher) level. These may include sites with a good examples of fairly common community types that are better represented elsewhere, but are important at a local scale.